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VISUAL ESSAY

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VISUALIZING PROTEST CULTURE IN CHINA'S HONG KONG: RECENT TENSIONS OVER INTEGRATION



1. Protester holds up a caricature of the Peking University professor who called Hongkongers 'Bastards' and 'Dogs'. The small peaceful protest was held in front of China's Central Government Liaison Office in the Western district of Hong Kong island. The Chinese reads: "If Hongkongese are dogs, then respectful Professor Kong should be euthanized!"



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2, 3, 4, 5. Demonstrators hold local Hong Kong newspapers critical of the Peking University professor's comments. Above, a toy dog and a rolled up banner used to 'beat' the dog is held. Right the protester waves it in the face of Hong Kong police in front of barricades protecting the Central Government Liaison Offices. Bottom right a protester uses an iPad to display another caricature of the Chinese professor. Use of iPads for displaying protest materials is a recent development in Hong Kong.



4



The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China was established on 1 July 1997 after more than 150 years of colonial rule by the UK. Unlike the rest of China, the Hong Kong SAR exists within a special enclave created under the 'One Country, Two Systems' policy where it enjoys limited democracy and many liberal freedoms such as freedom of speech and the press, and freedom to protest. Hong Kong also remains the only place within communist China where multi-party democratic elections, commemorations over the Tiananmen incident, and open protests for greater democracy and against the local and mainland governments can freely occur. So vibrant is Hong Kong's protest culture that in the past it has been referred to as the 'City of Protests'. However, unlike many other places, demonstrations in the SAR are

almost always non-violent and non-aggressive. They are so placid, in fact, they are often a family affair as it is not uncommon to spot young children in the middle of a procession – on their parents' shoulders, strapped to their chests or backs, or being pushed in a stroller adorned with slogans or signs! Although the 'One Country, Two Systems' rubric that provides the people of Hong Kong with their liberal freedoms has been largely successful, there have been increasing social and political pressures on the society as Hong Kong integrates more quickly and fully with its mainland sovereign. In the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis in 1998 and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 which had a serious impact on Hong Kong, the Chinese Government made large economic and tourist concessions to aid the SAR's economic recovery. Liberalization of



5

PROTEST OVER MAINLAND PROFESSOR'S COMMENTS
ABOUT HONGKONGERS, JAN 2012

China's tourism policy resulted in many tens of millions of mainland tourists visiting the small community. Since the beginning of 2003, around 100 million Chinese visitors have come to Hong Kong. In 2011 alone, the number of Chinese tourists (28.1 million) was the equivalent of four times the entire population of Hong Kong (HKSAR Government, 2012; Tourism Commission, 2012). This boosted one of the community's main industries (tourism) but since Hong Kong already has one of the highest population densities in the world, it also placed a lot of stress on the locals, their infrastructure and resources. Cultural, identity, and social tensions also exist between Hongkongers and Mainlanders. As many visitors may not speak the local Chinese dialect (Cantonese), have different cultural and social norms (Chen, 2011), or hold contemporary/historical rivalries with Hong Kong (in the same way that some Hongkongers hold their own negative stereotypes of Mainlanders), social tensions are an understandable result. In addition, the tourists have become a commodity. Many arrive as part of whirlwind tour groups who are shuttled quickly from one place to another for shopping excursions and, on occasion, unscrupulous tours take tourists to luxury or brand-name goods stops and pressure them to make purchases. This has resulted in some high-profile

incidents of local tour guides badgering mainland tourists which have been captured on video and disseminated over the internet, creating ill feelings from some Mainlanders towards Hongkongers. Likewise, after the opening of Hong Kong Disneyland in 2005, outbursts of rage from local people over the bad behavior and manners of some of the mainland visitors became a small media frenzy with the sentiments of 'us' versus 'them' remaining strong in the community years later. Some of these latent tensions boiled over in late 2011 and early 2012 as several high-profile incidents of cultural clashes between the two Chinese communities erupted in the media and online. This included an episode where, ironically, strong suspicions of communists and communism continue to exist vividly in the community. In December 2011, a small ideological clash affected a few Hong Kong universities when mainland students (who make up the majority of graduate and post-graduate students in Hong Kong) wearing red scarves during a student election were accused by some other students of being Chinese Communist Party members and trying to infiltrate the student unions. The mainland students defended themselves, saying they were simply reliving their Young Pioneer or Communist Youth League (CYL) 'school memories'. According to

7, 8. A young child holds up protest sign at a small anti-mainland driver and anti-mainland birth tourism protest in Victoria Park on Hong Kong island. Hong Kong's peaceful protests often have young children participating. This rally was only about 200 people and confined to a single soccer pitch in the Park.

6. Journalist holding pen in front of the Central Government Liaison Office.





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ANTI-MAINLAND DRIVER/ANTI-MAINLAND MOTHER PROTEST IN VICTORIA PARK, HK, FEB 2012



9, 10. Protester displaying an anti-mainland driver sign.

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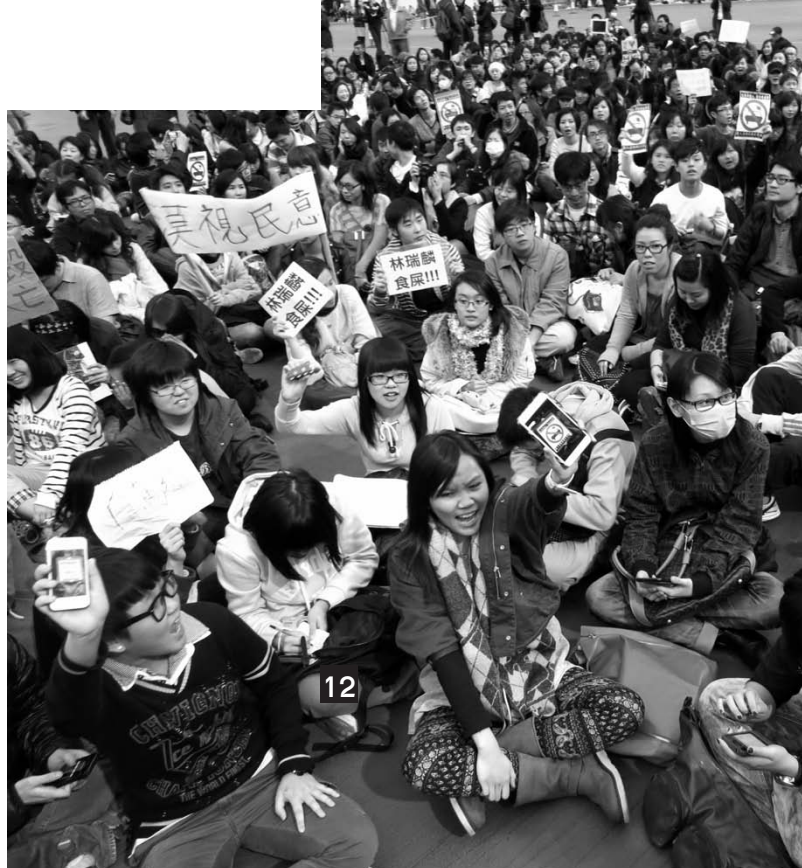


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11, 12. Youth demonstrators and older participants listen to a speech by an organizer of the protest. Protests like this are often publicized on Facebook pages, Twitter and/or through various websites. Information Communication Technology (ICT) are a prominent organizing method of many protests in Hong Kong as they are elsewhere.





13

13. Youth protesters at the anti-mainland driver protest in Victoria Park. Hong Kong's younger, post-80s generation have become increasingly politically active since at least 2010. This new generation is also the target of competing political socialization efforts by pro-establishment and pro-democracy groups.



one local newspaper: 'Slogans such as "Note the Communism locusts" and "China pigs invade Hong Kong universities"' were posted in a popular online forum which, understandably, offended many Mainlanders (Sha, 2011). In January 2012, a confrontation between a Hongkonger and a mainland Chinese train passenger who was eating inside the passenger car was caught on video and uploaded to the internet. Tapping a well of latent and not-so-latent Hong Kong-mainland tensions, the video went viral and became the impetus of a major Hongkonger versus Mainlander culture clash. A Beijing University professor, Kong Qingdong, interviewed on Chinese television shortly after the event, converted what was essentially a mundane, rather benign 'auntie' or 'uncle' video on the internet – just one of many – into a national incident of international renown.

Professor Kong's inflammatory rhetoric and comments criticizing Hongkongers for talking in Cantonese instead of the official version of Chinese, i.e. Putonghua (Mandarin), created a strong backlash in Hong Kong. Claiming that those who refuse to speak the mother tongue were 'bastards', he also singled out Hongkongers for rejecting a Chinese identity, calling them 'British running dogs'. This sparked a series of protests in Hong Kong condemning the Beijing professor and conflating unease over other Mainlander-related phenomena in the community. This included a backlash over birth tourism by mainland mothers coming to Hong Kong so that their children could gain the right of abode in the SAR (which was said to make it difficult for local expectant mothers to gain access to healthcare). In addition, the SAR Government's



14, 15. Seated protesters listening to speaker.



16, 17. Close-ups of protest material.



plans to allow mainland drivers to drive in Hong Kong sparked anger and fear. Hongkongers vividly recalled an October 2011 incident in a nearby Chinese city when a toddler was run over by a Chinese driver who simply paused, and then continued to drive over her a second time before leaving the scene. The fact that nearly 20 people callously passed the bleeding child on the street without stopping to give her any aid led many Hongkonger protesters to fear mainland drivers in Hong Kong might do the same. Ultimately, the protests over Professor Kong forced mainland and local authorities to intervene by attempting to calm people down on both sides of the Hong Kong–China boundary.

This visual essay examines several demonstrations and marches in Hong Kong that took place in January and February 2012 and were emblematic of these

integration tensions, providing insights into the social relations between Hongkongers and the SAR Government and between Hongkongers and Mainlanders. These were not the only protests that occurred and are clearly not the last as Hong Kong's integration with the mainland continues to gather steam, and political issues over greater political freedoms remain unresolved.



Fig.18. Protester staging at an anti-mainlander driver commencing in Causeway Bay before marching to the Hong Kong Government offices.

19. Hong Kong has one of the world's highest population densities. The Kowloon district has a density of over 44,500 people per square km. (HKSAR Government, 2012)



ANTI-MAINLAND DRIVER PROTEST CAUSEWAY BAY TO HKSAR GOVERNMENT HQ FEB 2012



20



21

20, 21, 22. A Hong Kong police officer records details of anti-mainland driver protest forming up in Causeway Bay before marching to the SAR Government headquarters. Causeway Bay is a lively entertainment and shopping district on Hong Kong Island frequented by mainland and other foreign tourists. The 'Civic Party' is one of the local pro-democracy political parties.



22

Banner size & content		
1	m x m	
2	m x m	
3	m x m	
4	m x m	
5	m x m	

Drum size & content		
4	m x m	
5	m x m	
6	m x m	

Number of Flag :		Number of drum :	
3	M/F	4	M/F
7	M/F	8	M/F

23



23. Protest banner and models depicting mainland cars driving in Hong Kong. The logo on the banner is of the Hong Kong Democratic Party, the largest pro-democracy political party in Hong Kong.

24



24. Mainland drivers entering the Hong Kong SAR have to attach a special license plate to their vehicles such as that depicted in the protest sign above and on the banner on the left. The logo on the protest sign and banner is for Hong Kong's leading pro-democracy party, the Democratic Party. Besides adding to Hong Kong's already congested roads, Hongkongers are worried that Mainland drivers won't comply with local laws.

25. Anti-mainland driver marcher wears a cap with stencil of Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei. After his detention in 2011, several groups in Hong Kong demanded he be released from Chinese custody. Guerilla 'Who's afraid of Ai Weiwei?' graffiti similar to this stencil appeared in many popular tourist and transportation hubs in Hong Kong following his arrest.



26. Anti-mainland driver protest decal on a participant/observer's back. Similar decals were placed elsewhere during the protest such as on the taillights of a Hong Kong police officer's motorcycle.





27, 28, 29. Different points during the march. Many marches proceed through heavily trafficked business and entertainment areas of Hong Kong island frequented by Mainland tourists. Flyways over main thoroughfares lining the march route often serve as observation posts for tourists and others to watch the processions.





30, 31. An anti-mainland driver marcher carrying a sign banning 'Locusts' – a local derogatory reference to the droves of mainland Chinese visitors to Hong Kong – Chinese tourists in 2011 (25 million) represented more than three times the whole population of the SAR. (HKSARG, 2012) 'Locusts' as a disparaging term became prominent in early 2012. It was a symbol in many different forms of protest literature including online videos set to popular Cantonese melodies and songs.



30



32

32,33,34. Points during the march. Below right: Protesters posing in front of the SAR Government headquarters building. Civic Party legislator and former Hong Kong SAR chief executive candidate Alan Leong Kah-kit stands in the center. The Civic Party is one of Hong Kong's pro-democracy political parties. Other pro-democracy groups, political parties and supporters often participate in Hong Kong's many social and political demonstrations.



31



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35. The procession arrives at the Hong Kong SAR Government and Legislative Council plaza. The banner on the car calls for preventing mainland drivers ('self-tour' driving scheme).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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36



37

36, 37. After various speeches outside the Hong Kong SAR Government and Legislative Council plaza, the protest concludes with the smashing of effigy of a mainland driver being destroyed.